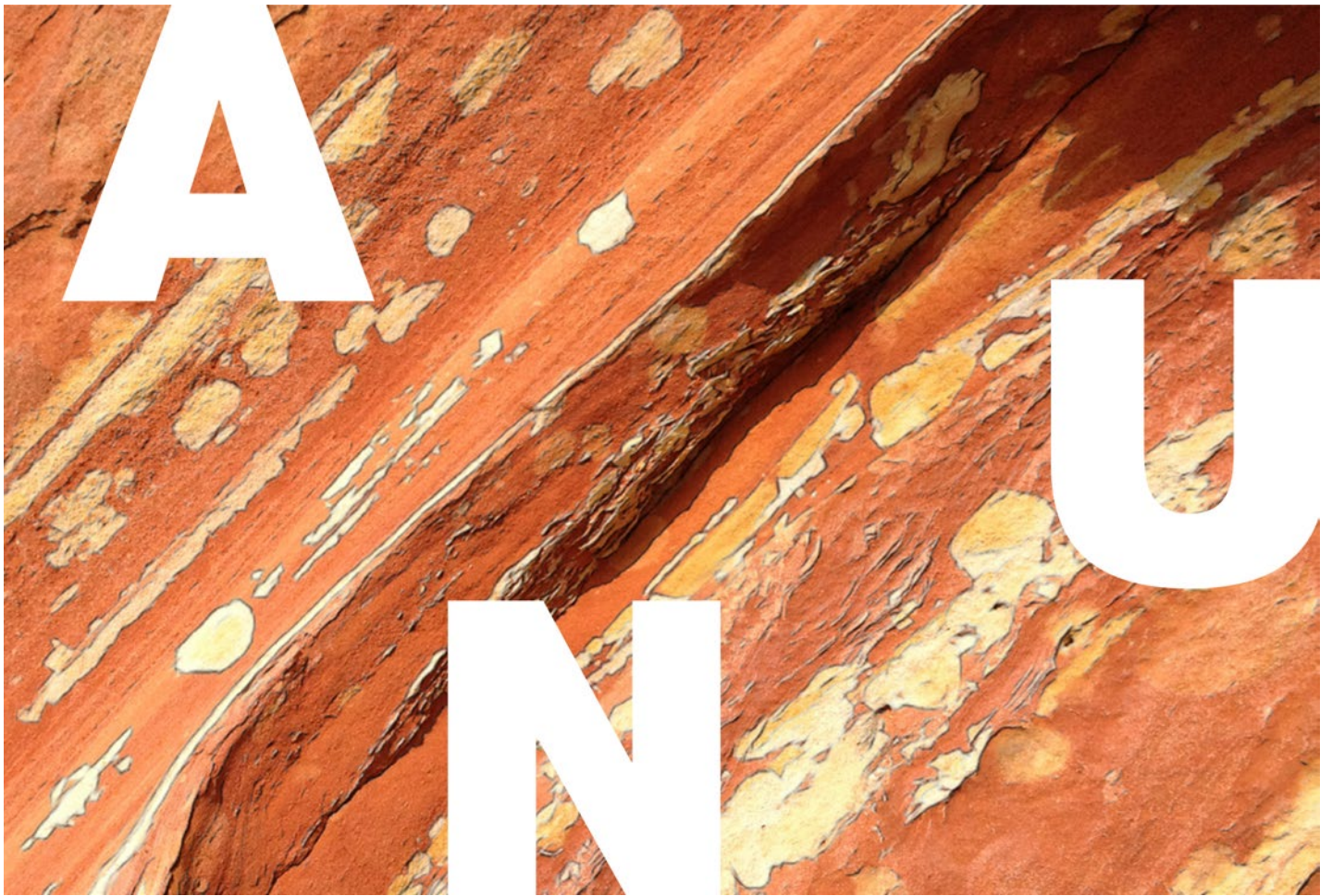




Australian
National
University



LET'S TALK ABOUT SUCCESS:
EXPLORING FACTORS BEHIND POSITIVE
CHANGE IN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

J. HUNT

Centre for
Aboriginal Economic
Policy Research
ANU College of
**Arts & Social
Sciences**

CAEPR WORKING PAPER NO. 109/2016

Series Note

The Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) undertakes high-quality, independent research to further the social and economic development and empowerment of Indigenous people throughout Australia. For more than 20 years, CAEPR has aimed to combine academic and teaching excellence on Indigenous economic and social development and public policy with realism, objectivity and relevance.

CAEPR is located within the Research School of Social Sciences in the College of Arts and Social Sciences at the Australian National University (ANU). The Centre is funded from a variety of sources, including ANU; the Australian Research Council; industry and philanthropic partners; the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs; and the Australian, state and territory governments.

CAEPR maintains a substantial publications program. CAEPR Working Papers are refereed reports that are produced for rapid distribution to enable widespread discussion and comment. They are available in electronic format only for free download from CAEPR's website:

caepr.anu.edu.au

As with all CAEPR publications, the views expressed in this Working Paper are those of the author(s) and do not reflect any official CAEPR position.

Dr Robert G. (Jerry) Schwab
Director, CAEPR
Research School of Social Sciences
College of Arts & Social Sciences
The Australian National University
May 2016



Let's talk about success: exploring factors behind positive change in Aboriginal communities

J. Hunt

Janet Hunt is a Senior Fellow at the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Research School of Social Sciences, College of Arts & Social Sciences, Australian National University.

Working Paper No. 109/2016
ISSN 1442-3871

ISBN 978-1-925286-08-3

An electronic publication downloaded
from <caepr.anu.edu.au>.

For a complete list of CAEPR
Working Papers, see
<caepr.anu.edu.au/publications/
working.php>.

Centre for Aboriginal Economic
Policy Research
Research School of Social Sciences
College of Arts & Social Sciences
The Australian National University

Abstract

What are the factors that enable some Aboriginal organisations to drive positive change in their communities? This paper draws on interviews with leaders of successful Aboriginal organisations to understand the factors behind the successes that they are achieving in their communities. It explores how they define and assess success and what they see as the factors behind their achievements. It discusses the challenges and critical turning points they have faced and what enables them to sustain their success. It also explores what they say are distinctively Aboriginal features about the way they work. The paper finds considerable continuities with previous studies of Aboriginal organisations, but also outlines some of the successful strategies they use in working with their communities.

Keywords: Aboriginal, success factors, community organisations, community development, leadership

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my enormous appreciation to all the interviewees who made time in their demanding schedules to talk to me at length about their organisational and community successes. I am also grateful to Reconciliation Australia for assisting me to identify a number of Indigenous Governance Awards finalists included in this research. Finally, I would like to thank three CAEPR reviewers – Jerry Schwab, Julie Lahn and Frances Morphy – for their valuable feedback on an earlier draft.

Acronyms

| | |
|--------|---|
| ALPA | Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation |
| AMSANT | Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory |
| ANU | The Australian National University |
| ATM | automatic teller machine |
| CAEPR | Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research |
| CEO | chief executive officer |
| GP | general practitioner |
| MWG | Muntjiltjarra Wurr gumu Group |
| NAIDOC | National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee |
| NPYWC | Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara Women's Council |
| TCU | Traditional Credit Union |
| VACCA | Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency |
| WYDAC | Warlpiri Youth Development Aboriginal Corporation |

Contents

| | |
|---|-----|
| Series Note | ii |
| Abstract | iii |
| Acknowledgments | iv |
| Acronyms | iv |
| Introduction | 1 |
| Previous research on Aboriginal success | 1 |
| This study | 2 |
| Defining success | 4 |
| Factors in success | 5 |
| Community ownership | 5 |
| Leadership | 6 |
| Respecting Indigenous world views | 6 |
| Vision and strategic direction | 7 |
| Funding | 7 |
| Relationships | 7 |
| Critical turning points and challenges | 7 |
| Context | 7 |
| Funding and policy environment | 8 |
| Organisational capacities | 9 |
| Working two ways | 9 |
| Sustaining success | 10 |
| Partnerships | 11 |
| What's distinctively Aboriginal? | 11 |
| Discussion | 12 |
| Notes | 14 |
| References | 15 |

Introduction

In a Parliamentary Reconciliation lecture in July 2015, Dr Laurie Bamblett, a Wiradjuri scholar, protested about the way people talk about Aboriginal people, with the focus always on 'Aboriginal disadvantage'. Referring to that term, he said 'I don't like it. It does more harm than good. I want to get rid of it. I'm not just here to moan. I want to tell you what does work' (Bamblett 2015:1). He went on to describe the strengths of his ancestors, his family and the small community at the Erambie Mission near Cowra where he grew up, which had produced 'PhDs, Masters degrees, a barrister, lawyers, a Harvard graduate and university-trained teachers' (p. 6). The community had harnessed its strengths to encourage reading and learning, yet it was never given credit for the children's achievements. 'Telling people they're disadvantaged kills them', he said. 'It takes their power and authority away. It disengages them' (p. 11). It is taking on the victim mentality that kills young people, he argued. 'So we have a choice, don't we? We can keep doing what doesn't work or we can talk instead about all the examples of Aboriginal advantage that show our young people how to live a good life' (p. 11).

With this idea in mind, I began this small piece of research into Aboriginal success. I was keen to examine the factors that enable some Aboriginal organisations to contribute to positive change in their communities. We all know about successful Aboriginal individuals who shine in sport, music or politics, for example, but my focus is on broader community outcomes, and how they have been achieved and sustained. While not wanting to dismiss the very significant challenges facing Aboriginal communities, I wanted to turn my attention to Aboriginal people and organisations that have created positive change in their localities or regions. I wanted to understand better why they succeed, including how they define success, with a view to enabling the necessary conditions for success to be more widely fostered. The 11 organisations that agreed to participate in this study are listed below (under 'Participating organisations').

Previous research on Aboriginal success

Given policy makers' concern to improve Aboriginal outcomes, it is surprising that more research has not been undertaken into what works, and what makes for success. The Closing the Gap Clearinghouse¹ has documented what works in a number of Indigenous program areas related to the Closing the Gap policy framework, and the What Works Program² has published a number of reports illustrating some successful practices in Indigenous education. Although these

studies mostly refer to what works in government programs and non-Indigenous institutions, which are not the focus of this study, they are still valuable. This paper is concerned with what works when development is Aboriginal driven.

Two major studies, both completed in the late 2000s, stand out as exceptions. The first is the work by Julie Finlayson (2007abc) for the Australian Collaboration, and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, about organisational success; the other is the work of the Indigenous Community Governance Project (Hunt et al. 2008), which focused on what worked and what did not work in Aboriginal community governance. Other work that has demonstrated successful Aboriginal achievement includes the case studies of Aboriginal ranger groups, highlighted through the People on Country project (Altman & Kerins 2012), and the community development work of the Central Land Council (Campbell & Hunt 2015). In addition, the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council promotes examples of successful Local Aboriginal Land Council programs on a website.³ Any web search of major Aboriginal organisations will demonstrate that Aboriginal success is evident in many areas, including health, child care, natural resource management, education and training, and, increasingly, economic development. Reconciliation Australia's biennial Indigenous Governance Awards⁴ attract nominations from many highly successful local Aboriginal organisations and projects, and the judges' task to select the winners is not easy, such is the quality of the entrants. Six of the 11 organisations participating in the research described in this paper (see 'Participating organisations') were Indigenous Governance Awards finalists (Reconciliation Australia 2005, 2006, 2008, 2012). Aboriginal-driven success is not hard to find, but research on how it has come about or been sustained is less evident.

Studies by both Finlayson (2007abc) and Hunt et al. (2008) were well resourced, and each conducted a number of in-depth case studies to explore what worked in service delivery and governance respectively. Both focused largely on the organisations themselves – their organisational strengths, and the capacities that enabled them to deliver services that were appropriate and client focused in a competent way (Finlayson 2007abc), and the governance arrangements that enabled them to govern effectively in a culturally legitimate way (Hunt et al. 2008). This study is far smaller; although it overlaps to some degree with both these previous studies, it focuses more specifically on Aboriginal success in creating positive change in communities.

Finlayson's (2007abc) findings point to the critical success factors of 'sound management and robust corporate governance' (2007c:11), 'efficient, responsive service delivery' (p. 14), strong community engagement, 'internal strength' (p. 16), accountability, strong leadership, a focus on staff development, an ability to respond to change, strategic engagement in partnerships, a strategic approach to planning, and a clear focus. These successful organisations are also intercultural, and external factors such as infrastructure also play a role in their achievements. Hunt et al. (2008) found that successful governance had to be culturally legitimate and effective. Cultural legitimacy requires a focus on sorting out relationships in complex communities and determining appropriate representation; effectiveness requires that the organisation has the capacity to deliver services to gain support from its constituency. Both legitimacy and effectiveness are required in successful organisations. Hunt et al. (2008) also found that forms of Indigenous governance are networked, are quite dispersed, and have subsidiarity as a strong principle – that is, decisions should be made as locally as possible by the people most immediately affected by them. More regional networked arrangements enable people to make collective decisions at a higher level for matters that are better addressed across a region. Action research by the Central Land Council has pointed to the importance of both Aboriginal decision making, and the right processes and support to communities to enable them to undertake successful development (Campbell & Hunt 2015).

This study

After gaining approval from the ANU Human Research Ethics Committee, I approached Aboriginal organisations that had evidently made a positive impact in their communities. Some of these organisations were selected from finalists in Reconciliation Australia's Indigenous Governance Awards; others had strong reputations for their diverse organisational achievements, and were known to me through my years of research work at CAEPR. Reconciliation Australia kindly assisted me to select organisations to approach by allowing me to view the nominations of finalists from the past three rounds of Indigenous Governance Awards.⁵ I was keen to find organisations involved in social and economic development in particular, and to have a spread of geographical locations represented. Only one of the organisations I included was also a participant in Finlayson's study (2007abc): the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA). Although my original goal was to reach up to 20 organisations, time constraints meant that, by the end of 2015, I had interviewed key personnel

from just 11 organisations – 6 involved in economic development and 5 in social development – and already some very strong themes were emerging.

Only one organisation that I approached declined to participate in the study, as it was already involved in various other research studies. Four more have been approached, but arrangements to participate have not been finalised; I will add these organisations to the study as opportunities arise.

At this stage, the geographical spread of participating organisations is three from Victoria (one urban, two regional), two from New South Wales (both urban), two from Central Australia, one from remote Western Australia and three from the Northern Territory (see below).

Participating organisations

Organisations and interviewees who participated are listed below, with a brief summary of their successful work. Those marked * have been winners or finalists in Reconciliation Australia's Indigenous Governance Awards.

Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory (AMSANT), Darwin, Northern Territory; Chief Executive Officer (CEO) John Paterson

The particular success the interview focused on was the Northern Territory Aboriginal Health Forum's (whose partners include the Northern Territory and Australian governments and AMSANT) policy shift to Aboriginal community control of primary health care; this reflects the aspirations of Aboriginal Territorians to make local decisions that impact on their health and wellbeing. The Aboriginal community-controlled health system in the Northern Territory is also delivering very positive outcomes against Northern Territory key performance indicators relating to various aspects of health.

Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation (ALPA), Darwin, Northern Territory; CEO Alastair King

This organisation's success relates to the sustained operation of Aboriginal-run quality community stores across remote Arnhem Land, employing many Aboriginal staff, with lower cost pricing on healthy foods, profits contributing to a much valued community benefits fund, and more recently, support for development of new enterprises and employment.

Ganbina, Shepparton, Victoria; CEO Anthony Cavanagh

Ganbina's success relates to its school-to-work transition program. Every year, hundreds of young people in its programs complete their year of education, and successfully transition to further education, training, tertiary education or employment, including in Melbourne.

Muntjiltjarra Wurrugumu Group (MWG),* Wiluna, Western Australia; Coordinator of the Wiluna Regional Partnership Agreement Maggie Kavanagh

The success of this group is that Wiluna now has a representative group who can partner with mining companies and government and tackle many of the barriers to employment that people in Wiluna face. They have shown how to engage the Aboriginal community successfully in these issues.

Muru Mittigar,* Penrith, New South Wales; CEO Peter Chia

This organisation has successfully sustained a multifaceted business, providing training and employment in a range of areas, such as land management, fire management compliance, cultural tourism and hospitality, to Western Sydney Aboriginal people. It also operates cultural educational programs for teachers and school groups.

Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara Women's Council (NPYWC),* Alice Springs, Northern Territory; CEO Andrea Mason

This organisation has delivered a range of services to remote-living Aboriginal women and their families to improve their social and emotional wellbeing. It successfully worked in coalition with other community organisations to advocate for Opal fuel to stop petrol sniffing in the NPY Lands.

Traditional Credit Union (TCU),* Darwin, Northern Territory; CEO Cathy Hunt, and Human Resources Manager Anne Shew

This organisation successfully provides credit union banking services across remote Arnhem Land, employing and training local Aboriginal staff, and delivering banking services in local languages.

Tribal Warrior, Redfern, New South Wales; Chair and CEO Shane Phillips

Tribal Warrior operates a marine training enterprise and has trained some 1000 Aboriginal people who now work in the marine industry. It also delivers cultural tourism programs on Sydney harbour and in schools. Its greatest

success is the hope and opportunity it has brought to the community.

Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency,* Melbourne, Victoria; CEO Muriel Bamblett

VACCA's success is in providing programs and services that reinforce Aboriginal culture and encourage best parenting practices in the Aboriginal community. They have successfully advocated for government models of response to child abuse and neglect in the Aboriginal community that reflect Aboriginal rights.

Warlpiri Youth Development Aboriginal Corporation (WYDAC),* Yuendumu, Northern Territory; CEO Susie Low

WYDAC has successfully addressed petrol sniffing in Warlpiri communities, and gone on to develop a very successful and multifaceted youth program that promotes youth development and leadership in remote Central Australia.

Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative, Geelong, Victoria; former Chair of the Board Jodie Sizer

Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative has been providing health, housing and social development programs for the Geelong Aboriginal community for many years; it has had great success with its child vaccination program, among others, and it runs the highly acclaimed Wathaurong Glass business.

Approach

Rather than undertaking lengthy case studies, I asked to speak to one or more people who had a long association with the organisation and could reflect on why it had been successful. These were mainly CEOs of the organisations (see above). All but two interviews were held face to face; two were over the phone because of logistical problems in arranging face-to-face meetings. Four of the 11 participants were non-Indigenous CEOs, mostly with lengthy associations with their organisations, who had been nominated to speak with me.

Clearly, the results from this approach are very reliant on the individual(s) who spoke to me, and others within or outside the organisations may have had slightly different analyses of the reasons for success. However, because this was an exploratory piece of research with limited researcher time and limited budget, and the intent was to find common factors across the various organisations, my judgment was that individual variations in emphasis would be less significant as the overall findings from the

group of organisations were drawn out. These findings can now be tested and elaborated further by other researchers, and feedback from Aboriginal organisations themselves may deepen the analysis in the future.

My questions explored:

- what the interviewees saw as the success they were having
- how they knew they were being successful
- what factors they believed had contributed to their success, both at the outset (if they were able to comment on that) and more recently
- whether there had been any critical turning points in the organisation's success
- major challenges the organisation had had to overcome
- partnerships or forms of support that had been particularly important
- factors that were critical now to the organisation sustaining its success in the community and perhaps developing it further
- whether they thought there was anything distinctively Aboriginal about the way they had undertaken their development work in the community.

I deliberately left the last question to the end of the interview, because recent public debates have suggested that culture is a barrier to development, and I wanted to allow people the opportunity to bring their own perspectives to bear on this question as and when they chose during the interview. Often the answer was emerging throughout the interview, and the final question enabled people to simply summarise or elaborate on how Aboriginal culture was reflected in what they did.

The participants generally spoke passionately and enthusiastically about the positive achievements their organisations were contributing to in their communities. In the following sections, I make extensive use of direct quotations from the interviewees to allow their points of view to emerge clearly.

Defining success

When participants spoke about success, they saw it in terms of various dimensions. Success involved meeting community needs and boosting community services. People often referred to specific outcomes that their organisations had achieved or were achieving, such as improving education and training outcomes,

and developing skills; reducing petrol sniffing; reducing young people's interaction with juvenile justice authorities; reducing crime; improving health, including mental health; and, most significantly, creating employment and fostering career progression. Some spoke about removing the blockages people face, such as lack of driver licences, unpaid fines, and illegal debts from unscrupulous operators. Some also spoke about their achievements in having influence on government policies and programs to ensure that they better respond to Aboriginal needs and reflect Aboriginal rights.

Alastair King, CEO of ALPA, said:

So the success of ALPA at community level is measured in a couple of different ways. One is the recognition of the brand and that it's their brand and that it's your business. Really important. The second one is that the business is filling a need and doing it really well, as good if not better as everyone else, and that business is successful because 94% of our staff are Yolngu. So it equates to not just employees but supervisors and customised training that fits within the Yolngu language and culture, so that they're not just employees – they're actually competent retail employees. The other side of it is that the benevolent programs are helping people that really need with family funerals, with medical escort, with education, with our nutrition program, freight subsidy to keep the price of healthy food down, credit advice, all those sorts of things.

Referring to a gathering organised by MWG with the Western Australian Department of Transport in Wiluna, Maggie Kavanagh of MWG said:

... at that first one, people made a commitment to pay off fines totalling \$100 000. And then the one we had a couple of weeks ago, \$65 000. So the whole message that people were giving to their family members was just deal with stuff, because a lot of people either didn't know, with people's mobility, weren't getting the fines that they had, were too nervous to go to the police station because they thought they might get a warrant for their arrest.

People also said their literacy was so low that they felt really embarrassed about dealing with it, again reluctant to go to the police station to deal with it. And also for a lot of young people I think just being so overwhelmed by the system they just don't know how to deal with it. So the MWG leading up fanned out to all their community and family members and said 'You guys come along and we'll just help

you deal with it'. And the response was absolutely overwhelming. There were people there, I thought I've been coming out to Wiluna and I've never seen these people, where have they come from? So it was really interesting because I think what we've cottoned on to is the model of doing this, and it's community owned, it's community driven and getting the right government staff.

Interviewees also spoke about the impact of their activities on people's sense of purpose, self-confidence and problem-solving capacities – they could see change in the way people felt about themselves. They spoke about their programs as providing opportunities for communities to be more self-determining, or said that the organisation promoted people's abilities to practice self-determination. Importantly, many spoke about the high level of community ownership and community engagement as important indicators of success. Community ownership was associated with the sense of self-determination and meeting aspirations, while community engagement was an indicator of the organisation's success in meeting needs and providing valued, friendly and supportive services.

For example, Maggie Kavanagh, in reference to MWG members undertaking public speaking, said:

I hear people say themselves 'We didn't think we could do this', and that to me is fantastic that they acknowledge that they have built up their confidence from having a go.

Success was also defined by some in terms of meeting accreditation standards or in comparison with other non-Indigenous service providers, indicating that the Aboriginal organisation performed at least as well as the non-Indigenous comparator, or often better in relation to Aboriginal clients. Having a good relationship with a wider group of stakeholders, such as funders and other supporters, was also seen as a sign of success. Finally, business expansion, growth and/or diversification were recognised as indicators of success.

Muriel Bamblett, CEO of VACCA, talking about the valuable contribution of a partner secondee, said:

... we did ... a review of all of our services, what we were funded for, against other services. And we found we were massively overperforming but not against what they were measuring us against. So when they looked at us, their judgment of us was vastly different to what our evidence was showing, and showed a gross shortfall in funding. We were

delivering on targets that were triple what we were actually funded for and for what we were achieving. That to me was so fulfilling because I thought we were doing something wrong, and we were never doing anything wrong, we were just overperforming and thinking that we weren't as good as other organisations. We were actually as good as, and in many cases better.

John Paterson, speaking about one of AMSANT's member organisations, said:

With Miwatj now controlling a number of health clinics in eastern Arnhem Land, the Miwatj CEO Eddie Mulholland informed to the AMSANT Board that there was a huge increase in patient contact, increase in episodes of care, increase in GP management plans and increase in anaemia management (with decrease on anaemia rates) as a result of it changing hands and local Yolngu providing the services.

Factors in success

Community ownership

While community ownership and control were seen as indicators of success, participants emphasised that they were also a key factor in their achievements. In 8 of the 11 cases, the strength of community ownership, the fact that the organisation was driven by the community, and the strong relations with the community were seen as critically important to success. The fact that programs had grown from the community (or communities) and their context, and from identified needs or aspirations, was also seen as an important factor in success. Often, the organisations had evolved incrementally, responding to changes in context, and with new needs or ideas emerging over time as they started to address an initial issue. New opportunities or needs arose in a dynamic way. The value of a positive, people-friendly approach and the ability to shift mindsets from deficit thinking to a strengths-based approach were also mentioned. For example, Ann Shew from the TCU commented:

... why was it a success to start with? I think because the community itself chose to do it. It wasn't imposed. It wasn't something white man kind of went in and said 'You need to have this so let's have this'. It was something they wanted. They said 'There's no bank here, why can't we do it?' So community elders made the first move, and I think that is probably the reason it was so successful is that it was the community that started it, not somebody else.

They then were lucky to have the support of a group of people who could make it happen. So they couldn't have made it happen on their own. They needed the influence and skill and education of others, and they all came together and did that.

Shane Phillips outlined the impact of a circumnavigation of Australia undertaken by Tribal Warrior in its early years:

I went from being angry and resentful, like many of us; we just sort of saw all of our disconnection. But we were empowering ourselves to own our own future. I think that was the real tangible tool that came out of it, we thought we could do something ourselves, we don't need anyone to do this. And we knew there were all these deficits out there that we could focus on, or we could think about moving the lens for ourselves and our local community, and focus on what we could do to change it ourselves.

Muriel Bamblett also highlighted these aspects:

For me, the most exciting part about working with VACCA is being able to be change agents, to be able to empower families and build on their strengths to keep our kids at home.

And John Paterson, CEO of AMSANT, commented:

It all comes back to empowering communities. Enabling communities to design, develop, implement and review programs, and to make those decisions on an ongoing basis rather than having somebody in parliament – parliamentarians making decisions and then filtering them down through their bureaucracies or other service providers to make it happen on the ground. There's just no room for negotiation sometimes. There's obviously an ideological agenda or policy that governments may want to impose on communities which just doesn't fit, is irrelevant, culturally inappropriate and has no relevance for communities. The preferred model is community control, take it out of government's hands and empower our communities and people, and allow them to get on with it.

Leadership

Clearly, good leadership by particular individuals or small groups of people has been important in every case, and many mentioned a good board as well as good staff, particularly CEOs. Good management and good governance at the board level were seen as crucial to success. Highly capable financial and business

management were especially required. Importantly, it seemed that staff and board stability was an important factor, because six interviewees specifically mentioned the value of long-serving boards and staff, all of whom know their business and have learned from experience. For example, Jodie Sizer, former Chair of the Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative Board emphasised:

... strong leadership means that people are always doing what is best for the organisation and will always have that engagement so you know what is. It's kind of like a triangle at the top, so strong leadership and effective engagement, and motivated by what's the right thing to do.

John Paterson, AMSANT, explained the value of staff stability:

We have a very strong and committed team out at Pintupi Homelands Health Services. Leon Chapman is the CEO, and he has built his medical team of doctors and nurses over a number of years now, and they've got this real strong relationship with the community there. I think they've just signed off on their fourth contract of three years, so by the end of the contract, there's going to be a period of about 12 years where this stable team just stayed and worked with the Pintupi mob. That's brilliant.

Respecting Indigenous world views

Another important factor, particularly evident in the more remote locations but not confined to them, is the ability to adopt a business model that respects Indigenous world views and works with them in a genuine way. This requires balancing contemporary Aboriginal values with the demands of the wider world. It means having staff with excellent cross-cultural skills who can facilitate this hybridity, and evolve models of working that are effective and compatible with the cultural milieu in which they are operating. Often, it is about having a long-term alliance between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who have developed strong relationships, levels of trust and expertise in two-way working. Susie Low, CEO of WYDAC, emphasised this:

The other thing that any member of the board will tell you if people ask about success in our program, they will say that it has been the long-term alliance between – we say Yapa and Kardiya or Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ... So making the most of each nation's skills if you like, and blending them in a way that works for Warlpiri people. And I think many organisations say they want to be totally Aboriginal,

ours says why would you do that because we work very well together and always have, and actually that is one of the keys to success ...

And Alastair King, CEO of ALPA, also stressed:

Having a business model that respects and can work cohesively with the Yolngu world view and culture is absolutely critical.

Vision and strategic direction

Having a vision or strategic direction and sticking to it were also seen as very important, along with good planning and investment in the future, rather than being just opportunistic and reactive to external opportunities. Some of those involved in the most successful economic development initiatives stressed their efforts to try to shape the strategic environment they were operating in – a step beyond basic strategic planning. They emphasised the importance of trying to shape or influence the opportunities that would open up in the future so that these opportunities would be favourable. Social development-focused organisations also talked about shaping policies. For example, Muriel Bamblett, CEO of VACCA, commented:

At the moment we're at the cutting edge of developing different models. Government's interested in a reform agenda, they want to do things differently, but we actually want to lead that model work, and I think Aboriginal people have led in this area for a long time.

Having good relationships with various non-Indigenous stakeholders was clearly seen as critical to success, whether these were government or private sector organisations and individuals. Every interviewee could name particular individuals or organisations that had been extremely important to their organisation's success. Developing strong relationships with various parts of government, from ministers and their advisers to senior officials, was emphasised by some; for others, the key relationships were with the corporate sector or philanthropic organisations, or lawyers for legal advice. When there were key people in these external stakeholder organisations who were supportive and respectful, and could work alongside Aboriginal people in a respectful and empowering way, it was a great help to the Aboriginal leaders.

Funding

Another important factor that was commonly cited was having adequate funding. In several cases, this involved diversification of funding sources so that the organisation was not overly reliant on any one. In some locations, having access to independent financial advice was also seen as an important feature for success.

Relationships

Overall, relationships were a key theme – relationships with community, relationships between board and staff, and relationships with important other stakeholders and supporters. Another theme that came through all the discussions was the holistic nature of the way the organisations work.

Critical turning points and challenges

I analyse the questions about critical turning points and challenges together because the answers to both revealed what was important in helping the organisation through difficult times or difficult situations. Clearly, almost every organisation had been through difficult times, but they had survived and often learned a great deal through an often rather painful process.

Context

I turn first to a group of issues relating to the context of the communities themselves. The challenges people face are clearly multifaceted, and it is the interaction of many social complexities that makes the work of these successful organisations particularly challenging. The effects of poverty, intergenerational trauma, poor health, low levels of formal education, overcrowded housing, socially disruptive behaviours, lack of transport, poor infrastructure (including lack of accommodation for staff) and high costs of operating (particularly in the more remote locations) all combine to make successful development work in these communities extremely complex and challenging. Many interrelated issues have to be resolved together to make a real difference, and most organisations have to focus on specific aspects that they can address, recognising these interrelated issues. Furthermore, complex community politics in some locations can also be challenging to negotiate their way through. For those wanting to expand, the accommodation, infrastructure and transport constraints are real. Programs often cannot expand without

additional facilities and equipment, as well as enhanced management; this means having sufficient staff with management expertise.

Jodie Sizer, Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative, explained:

The thing in these Aboriginal organisations is they do so many things so we become, under the one roof, we become experts at health which is all things, all things. So we've got kids, babies, and on the other side of the social and emotional wellbeing we've got alcohol and drug workers, we've got family services, we've got the cultural program, housing program and that's just massive, so to at any one time have everything working perfectly in a world where it is hard to get good staff there always is funding uncertainty, there's something always starting and something else is ending trying to continue that longer-term vision.

Alastair King, CEO of ALPA, also talked about the:

... high cost of operating out there and all the rest of it; freight and everything we do costs more. People to this day will take money for a bereaved funeral and that can cost the corporation up to \$15 000 because if no-one else will fly the body out because the family can't deal with the funeral straight away, we do, \$2500–3000 one way. No-one else will store the body, we do, \$120 a day plus treatment plus transport from the airport. And then we do it all – and coffin and send the body back. We sell coffins in our stores for under \$1000. The cheapest coffin in town is \$1800. Then the charter back and then food for the visitors.

Funding and policy environment

A second set of challenges relates to the funding and policy environment. To be successful, organisations need a level of stability in the policy environment and longer-term funding arrangements (three years or more). They also need funding to have some flexibility so that they can be responsive to the local context in a timely way. There were several comments that government funding is often too prescriptive, not timely or flexible enough, and that it is increasingly linked to a compliance culture and a heavy burden of reporting. Rapid staff turnover within government departments can also present difficulties to Aboriginal organisations.

Some of the successful organisations had moved away from government funding, either fully or to some

degree, because they found it too constraining. Anthony Cavanagh (Ganbina) found that private sector money allowed them to be more flexible and responsive, and felt that this funding was provided with a much higher level of trust and in the context of good relationships, which need to be nurtured. Others who were engaging successfully in contracts and tendering in the private sector found that their funding security was greater when they had a range of partners. Andrea Mason (NPYWC) noted that private sector fundraising allowed them to secure annual funding for women's-only law and culture activities, which government was less inclined to adequately fund on an annual basis. A Jawun⁶ secondee from the private sector had been personally motivated to organise the Larapinta Extreme Trail⁷ event, which raised funds for the annual NPYWC women's law and culture meeting and related activities.

Three participants reported that government policy was affecting their success: Peter Chia (Muru Mittigar) felt that government risk aversion resulting from historical investment failures was delaying the ability of Muru Mittigar to obtain larger premises to accommodate diversification and strengthening of the business, and two other participants could clearly articulate how a government's changed policy was affecting the viability of their business. These effects could be either positive, through changes to tender size (Peter Chia, Muru Mittigar), or negative – for example, when income management began and then Northern Territory community councils, many of which held TCU accounts, were abolished, causing significant loss of TCU business (Cathy Hunt, TCU).⁸ The ending of the Community Development Employment Projects program has also caused Wathaurong Glass, a subsidiary company of Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative, to rethink its business model.

Cathy Hunt, CEO of TCU, explained:

So we lost all the council banking at the time. Then the Intervention came in so 50% of people's money was left on the basics card, so we lost 50% of people's money as well that was coming into our bank. So yeah, we've had huge challenges. Plus the ATM reforms, so the major banks paid the fees on behalf of their members in partnership with two ATM providers in some communities, which means that they won't put our ATM in there ...

Susie Low, CEO of WYDAC, also noted:

The other thing I've noticed in the board is over the last 10 years, is just an amazing adaptability.

The level of accounting and transparency has gone through the roof and, not only that, the higher demands of government departments – for example, some of our donors now have in their contracts that people must have X qualification in order to do a job. And that was never the case before, and people like Peggy Brown, our founder who has saved lives for 21 years, is no longer considered competent to do the job because she doesn't have a Cert IV in alcohol and other drugs. So we've had to explain these changes along the way and then look for clever ways to make it work for us anyway. And as it turns out, for example, at the outstation Peggy can be called a support worker, but she can't be there on her own. There has to be someone with a Cert IV present at all times.

And John Paterson, CEO of AMSANT, said:

I can understand that governments need to have some sort of understanding around risk management plan for funded organisations but to be asking organisations – like every six months – to fill out a risk assessment management plan was over the top. It defeated the purpose of organisations getting on with the job of delivering services. The money they gave us was predominantly used to invest into the administration of, and getting the personnel to do, all this office work. Many organisations were of the view that this money could be better used for frontline service delivery and those sorts of things. That was a real hindrance and it really put unnecessary pressure on services right across the board ...

Organisational capacities

Another set of issues related to the organisation itself. Critical moments in the organisations' lives and ongoing challenges they faced revealed the importance of good management systems in the organisation, particularly good financial and business systems so that people make well-informed decisions about their organisations and businesses. A second important factor was finding and retaining the right staff, particularly staff at middle and senior management levels. Several organisations were finding workforce capacity shortfalls a problem; this meant that they had to be an 'employer of choice' in a competitive market for experienced Aboriginal staff. They are often competing with governments and private sector employers that can offer higher salaries, so they have to make their organisation very attractive to prospective employees as well as to retain current ones. While many clearly develop staff capacity internally and 'grow their own' managers, this rarely meets all their

needs. Peter Chia (Muru Mittigar) spoke about a time when they needed to move some (mainly non-Indigenous) staff on as the organisation's direction changed, and some untapped skills of Aboriginal staff had not been recognised by previous management. A hard decision, but clearly this was necessary to enable the organisation to adapt to changed external circumstances, increase Aboriginal participation at decision-making levels of the business, and sustain itself long term for diversified and niche market activities.

Working two ways

Several participants talked about the challenges inherent in being at the intersection of ancient and modern cultures in the complex environments that both present. Negotiating this intersection is clearly an ongoing demand, particularly as the contemporary context is constantly changing and Aboriginal people have to respond accordingly. Andrea Mason, CEO of NPYWC, explained:

... it's just the ongoing challenge of being authentic in an environment where we are constantly responding and adjusting. That said, the women have created in the organisation a very strong spine of what it means to be an Aboriginal woman from our region and all that comes with that, as far as cultural identity and law and culture and authority and responsibility. But the state of flux around that, all of the political and social changes, that's always been there, and it will always be there, and it will never let up either.

So I think in this environment and to be successful and to be solutions focused, you have to know how to maintain a level of resilience and be authentic in your identity.

And Alastair King, CEO of ALPA, told me:

... when they made the uniform laws of work health and safety and it hit here on 1 January, I think, 2013. I am thinking this is a minefield of risk but not just risk for the company but personal risk for club officers, people that control the organisation, myself and other senior management but also the board. How am I going to get that across to people? ...

The board talked about it in Yolngu for a while, and one senior man said, 'Explain that again'. So I went through it again, we had a pyramid diagram of responsibility and he said, 'Yes, us too'. I said, 'What do you mean?' This old man he said, 'Us too. So in our governance structure, in our law, if I'm

running a ceremony for my clan and someone gets hurt or injured or dies I'm responsible and there are punishments'. I thought, 'Case closed. We've got this'.

Participants, especially those involved in economic development, talked about their need to be nimble and flexible as the business environment in which they are operating changes. They have to be a step ahead of the game in many ways, strategically assessing the environment, trying to shape it to favour them (e.g. through favourable government procurement policy), and adjusting their business as necessary to sustain it financially, and particularly to sustain employment, which is all-important to their communities. While many of the successful organisations are social enterprises, they recognise that they also have to be commercially viable. If an organisation is to grow its programs, a further consideration is whether it has the physical facilities and increased management capacity that a larger program demands. Susie Low, WYDAC, talked about the challenges of taking on new programs, even if they fit the mandate of the organisation:

We had a really clear strategic plan and we're doing another one this year. I think the problem is, often there will be something that is absolutely within our core values and principles such as a youth program in a nearby community, but then of course we have to weigh up capacity, and the capacity decreases because ... the capacity within management does not grow, it's just not funded. And accommodation for people within management, that never comes either.

As Muriel Bamblett (VACCA) explained, growth can also change the nature of an organisation, making it less like a family. Anthony Cavanagh (Ganbina) also spoke of success bringing with it the risk that funders would move on, when in fact their long-term support was critical.

A further area mentioned by participants (particularly, but not exclusively, those in southeast Australia) was the need to work strategically in non-Indigenous forums, so that non-Indigenous organisations can work more effectively with Aboriginal people and organisations. They know that the demands are far greater than Aboriginal organisations alone can meet, and non-Indigenous players also have key roles. A more community-wide effort is needed, but with key Aboriginal organisations at the core, giving direction, and fostering cohesive and collaborative efforts.

Sustaining success

Many of these themes were reflected in the way people spoke about what was needed now to sustain their success – notably, having a strategic plan and orientation to shape their operating environment. But two issues stood out. The first revolved around strengthening the capacities of the people involved, both the staff and the board. This involved internal strategies of succession planning, upskilling and mentoring, and generally looking after and developing staff, but in some cases it also required investment in wider workforce development. The need to retain strong leadership and develop management capacities if the organisation was to grow was also mentioned, as well as the need to maintain board governance training and generally improve education levels. Retaining the right people in leadership positions – people who would put the community's interest to the fore – was also emphasised, along with the need for continued close engagement with the community (or communities) the organisation served. For example, Muriel Bamblett, CEO of VACCA, said:

I think the workforce is our biggest risk going forward ... I think we still have to invest in it because there have been people that have brought innovation to VACCA, they've grown to it and have continued to take it forward, our policy, our advocacy, how do we strengthen that?

Peter Chia, CEO of Muru Mittigar, also emphasised this:

It involves a maturity of a business to acknowledge its workforce capacity building of key personnel so 'middle management', skilled Aboriginal people, can lead in culturally sensitive way from the frontline areas. Establishing and maintaining respected and respectful middle management teams in any organisation is no easy feat. You've got to be pretty good at your job. You've got to combat all business and operational needs. There can be racial tensions often from within and outside the business, dealing with clients who have limited cultural awareness, and intended and unintended prejudice ... There's a lot of demands we put on our key personnel to operate as a self-funding enterprise in a competitive market place while developing a workforce which is historically a small resource requiring significant expansion and development over a future generation of workers ... Within the same pay, same skilled structures, we try to create that family bond without losing focus of our clients' and investor needs, including government. Wholistic support can go a bit beyond the boundaries of the professional workplace,

without creating human resource and internal equity issues inadvertently. Frontline staff are allowed to go above and beyond to empower staff, because we all know the demands and challenges that are out there for staff to deliver for us as a business and to improve the quality of life for working staff at the same time, such as our flexible arrangements for aspiring and talented working mothers, or single working fathers, and caregivers.

The second common theme was around business and financial management. Clearly, these organisations understood the need for good financial management and reporting so that they make good decisions, but they also indicated that they had to ‘learn the language of business’ and make sure they retained their commercial viability. Some talked about diversifying their clients, others about building more external relationships that could help them maintain or develop their programs. Alastair King (ALPA) spoke specifically about not trying to do everything, but spinning small local businesses off the organisation, and keeping business and wider community benefit activities very clearly separated. Tribal Warrior also was encouraging small businesses, such as catering, to spin off its main work. Alastair King, CEO of ALPA, explained:

Local people are looking for a job, and these organisations are taking up every opportunity. I think it’s also really key that every single thing we do has to stack up commercially and pass the sustainability test.

Partnerships

In every case, partnerships have been important in helping these successful organisations achieve what they have. The mix of partners varied with the context, but included government agencies, private sector companies, philanthropic bodies, individuals (including Jawun secondees), technical and further education institutions, other training institutions, non-Indigenous nongovernment organisations, legal firms providing pro bono advice, and local networks relevant to the organisation’s mandate. The right partners to provide specific skills and support or adequate funding have clearly been very important in each case. Interviews did not explore in detail what contributed to successful partnerships. Some partnership research is already available (see Hunt 2013ab), but this may be another valuable area for further exploration.

What’s distinctively Aboriginal?

All of the participants could point to some distinctively Aboriginal features about the way they worked. The most common response was that Aboriginal culture was embedded in everything they did. For example, Maggie Kavanagh (MWG) said, ‘the model is an Aboriginal model’, Susie Low (WYDAC) that the organisation was ‘Warlpiri centred’, Muriel Bamblett (VACCA) that ‘Aboriginal culture is at the forefront of everything’. Others talked about the fact that the way the organisation worked was influenced by Aboriginal history and stories. John Paterson (AMSANT) acknowledged that ‘strong traditional cultural practices’ are still evident in the communities they engage with, and staff need to be aware of cross-cultural safety issues that might arise in their work. The need for cultural mentors and adequate cultural induction of staff from outside the locality was mentioned. The fact that services are provided in local languages and based on cultural values was seen as a real strength in some of the more remote locations. In southeast Australia, the importance of honouring cultural protocols and making sure workers feel culturally safe on country when they are doing a job were mentioned. Peter Chia, CEO of Muru Mittigar, made the following point:

As our services are spreading to regions outside of Darug Country due to diversification and expansion, we need to be really careful. Risk assessments for operations staff include cultural risk controls in the same documents as work health and safety procedures. There’s men’s and women’s country. If the knowledge is made available through appropriate consultation with the local traditional owners during tendering stages, it reduces both cultural risk and commercial losses due to insufficient cultural due diligence. The assumption that all Aboriginal people are aware of all these risks is also an issue within conventional business practice. Some younger people are more or less fortunate to have a level of cultural awareness provided by their family, Elders or support network, and requires the workplace to assist and promote cultural awareness within a supportive workplace wherever possible. Cultural due diligence can strengthen relationships between neighbouring communities; however, it is sometimes challenging if activity or variability/frequency of funded works is not consistent between groups, therefore creating animosity, equity and political differences, whether real or perceived.

In remote areas, interviewees emphasised the significance of culture:

You have to be flexible and you have to be aware of their culture and how things work out there. You can't just do the white man world thing. We always talk about working in the two worlds because that's what we're doing. You've got to balance both of them. (Cathy Hunt, TCU)

Well, it is Warlpiri centred, definitely. At the heart of everything we do, the board is saying this is the way we do things and if government are saying they want it this way, let's look at how we can still make it work for us. (Susie Low, WYDAC)

Making sure that you don't take the Aboriginal out of the Aboriginal organisation, the Aboriginal way and knowledge and culture. (Alastair King, ALPA)

Early in the history of the organisation, key women spent time thinking about the practice of learning, and so this dynamic of action learning, Janet, is one the women worked out, it's their framework, and it's based on an Anangu cultural framework. After so many years, this practice of learning is very much in the way we do think and act here. (Andrea Mason, NPYWC)

Another thread in the responses was that the decisions were made by Aboriginal people, in terms of both governance and day-to-day management. The board and staff were Aboriginal; for the NPYWC, the fact that the governance was strongly grounded in Aboriginal women's law and authority was specifically emphasised. Additionally, Anthony Cavanagh (Ganbina) indicated that the Aboriginal community viewed the organisation as Aboriginal. Others (e.g. Jodie Sizer, Wathaurong) mentioned the relationships they had with the Aboriginal community, particularly trust, understanding and reputation. A couple (Peter Chia, Muru Mittigar; and Anthony Cavanagh, Ganbina) mentioned the various Aboriginal events they hold, such as NAIDOC week and other cultural activities.

Thus, while the distinctiveness was clearly evident, Muriel Bamblett (VACCA) and Anthony Cavanagh (Ganbina) mentioned that in their work they encounter some unhelpful attitudes that they work to overcome – these included reluctance to engage with service providers that could genuinely help families, and families not always wanting young people who need to leave their communities for study or work opportunities to go.

These attitudes may have arisen from negative historical experiences. Anthony Cavanagh explained:

... you will see that there's culture embedded everywhere. It pops out at you. And there's a methodology in why we're doing that, it's because we understand that the futuristic opportunities of an Aboriginal kid moving away from his family and taking up a job with Westpac in Melbourne, or taking up a job doing something that is totally foreign to our culture, then families and communities need to start to grapple with that and understand it and allow it.

Discussion

These preliminary findings strongly reinforce those of Finlayson (2007abc), through her case studies, about the characteristics of successful organisations in service delivery. Finlayson's policy recommendations relating to accountability, funding, staffing and alliances remain highly relevant today, as the above findings indicate. Although details of governance were not my focus, where governance issues arose, the findings also reinforced those of the Indigenous Community Governance Project, particularly in relation to cultural legitimacy and effectiveness.

However, several issues emerged more prominently in this study than in previous studies. These differences may be related to the particular focus and method (e.g. interviewing leaders rather than more comprehensive case studies); the different organisations participating, particularly the number of organisations involved in economic development activities compared with Finlayson's study; and the fact that the policy and funding environment has changed considerably since the mid-2000s.

First, this study, unlike Finlayson's, rather than taking a predetermined definition of success, asked participants to explain how they were successful and how they knew that they were successful. In response, they emphasised the level of community engagement they fostered and some specific positive outcomes they had achieved. While they focused on delivering a good service or maintaining a strong program, their way of judging their achievements emphasised the extent to which they involved Aboriginal people and met their aspirations or needs, as well as the outcomes or specific changes they had brought about. Many also judged success by shifts in the self-confidence and capacities of their people (including staff members and constituents), and the way their work increased people's sense of being more self-

determining – countering the victim or fatalistic mentality that is sometimes evident in communities. A definite theme was that empowering and developing people was an important measure of success.

Second, the responsiveness and incremental growth of the organisations emerged quite strongly from the interviews. Many of these successful organisations started small, responding to particular needs, and over time expanded either geographically or in terms of program diversity, tackling new issues that emerged. As they did so, they had to develop their skills, governance and management systems simultaneously, and they continue doing this. This reinforces the need for funding sources to recognise that they need to allow for this development in funding arrangements – in terms of both staff time and time for training, mentoring and exchange opportunities for staff and board members – so that they can strengthen their capacities, especially management capacities, as organisations expand their programs. Further, many activities that underpin organisations' close relationship with communities are unfunded, yet extremely important to the program's success.

Third, the funding environment still appears to be compliance focused and overly prescriptive, and have a heavy burden of reporting. In some cases, organisations may have to modify what they do to retain government funding. Otherwise, to retain greater flexibility, they have to find alternative funding sources; this requires much relationship building with external players, who are often geographically distant to the organisations themselves, especially the more remote ones. The impact of short-term, stop-start funding regimes on an organisation's capacity to retain and develop skilled and experienced staff needs to be recognised. Staff stability and development seem to be strongly associated with success.

Peter Chia, CEO of Muru Mittigar, captured some of these concerns:

So we have reduced our reliance on what was our sole revenue source, mining, sand and gravel quarry. It was roughly about 90–95% of revenue pre-2010, now diversified to about 20 different revenue sources, so that's proved to be a good model to self-govern and make our own decisions and choose our own direction without having to either be told, or to spend up to 30–40% of our energy on reporting and acquittals and the things that come along with government transparency and so on.

Fourth, perhaps because of the number of economic development initiatives included in this study, the importance of business and financial management, business strategy and commercial viability of the enterprise has emerged more strongly than in previous studies, and as critical to success. It has illustrated how government policies can affect this both positively and negatively. If government is keen to foster Aboriginal social enterprises, it needs to engage closely with them on what policy shifts could help or hinder their development, both in general and in specific locations. For example, social procurement policies can provide favourable opportunities to Aboriginal organisations. But it is also evident that the purpose of this good business expertise is to enable the organisation to continue the valuable work it is doing in the community – providing jobs and skills, building confidence and capacity, and delivering needed services. These are nonprofit organisations whose goals are to make positive change in their communities, and they judge themselves on this basis. Business skills are a means to an end, as Shane Phillips, CEO of Tribal Warrior, explained:

You know what's really cool: everyone's learning the language, the new language of business. While we're doing it, we're keeping our integrity there, we're doing it not just to make money but to sustain ourselves and to look after the families ...

So what we're saying here is it's not just about having jobs, it's having purpose and value. And people have seen that. So not everyone's making money, but everyone's helping each other do things.

It was important to explore the role of Aboriginal culture in these organisations' success, because government policy has moved more aggressively in recent years towards mainstream organisations rather than Aboriginal community sector organisations in service delivery. Interestingly, these successful organisations all see their cultural and community embeddedness as significantly contributing to their success. At the same time, they recognise that they have to operate in the contemporary context, and so they need to negotiate its intersection with the cultural context they operate within. This is particularly the case for organisations operating in more remote regions. It involves ensuring that non-Indigenous staff have the cultural knowledge and skills to operate effectively, as well as enabling Indigenous staff and boards to fully understand the mainstream requirements that their organisations must comply with. Both demands take time and resources. Organisations

also recognise that they sometimes have to challenge unhelpful community attitudes, and they feel able to do so sensitively.

Finally, as I set out to find out how the organisations were creating positive change in their communities, it is clear that they are using very diverse strategies, depending on their geographical and socioeconomic context, and the sector of work. Clearly, they are very focused on sustaining their organisations as the vehicles that drive change. Common themes underlying their approaches with their communities are:

- building on strengths, and giving people the skills, responsibilities and confidence to take on new tasks and new roles
- doing this with the right supports in place to mentor and train in very practical ways, often on the job, and to encourage people to develop themselves
- working holistically to help resolve the many challenges individuals face in being able to have a job and progress in their employment
- supporting people to have a voice in decisions affecting them, and enabling that voice to have influence through their organisation
- ensuring that Aboriginal people can take control, and determine priorities that meet their aspirations and needs
- doing all this within a cultural framework relevant to the location, especially (but not exclusively) in more remote communities, with staff who are highly capable interculturally.

This all suggests that the deficit model that underpins current, often coercive policies is at odds with these successful Aboriginal models of development.

Organisations successfully creating change in their communities are taking an empowering, supportive approach; building people's skills and confidence; setting expectations, and supporting people to meet them; and enabling them to take on new responsibilities and achieve often undreamed-of success. Policy frameworks are needed that provide a more stable and enabling environment for Aboriginal organisations to operate in, using an empowerment approach, with real resources for capacity development, especially at the managerial level.

Notes

1. See www.aihw.gov.au/closingthegap/publications.
2. See www.whatworks.edu.au.
3. See ourmob.org.au/glen-innes-local-aboriginal-land-council.
4. See www.reconciliation.org.au/iga.
5. The criteria for these awards relate to innovation, effectiveness, self-determination and leadership, cultural relevance and legitimacy, and future planning and resilience (Reconciliation Australia 2012).
6. Jawun provides skilled secondees from corporate Australia and government to support Indigenous organisations to achieve their goals. See <http://jawun.org.au>.
7. This is becoming an annual event, which will be run again in 2016; see www.larapintawalk.com.
8. The TCU argued that banking services should be seen as essential services and subsidised by government. The TCU's model provides local Aboriginal employment and training, as well as banking services in local languages, whereas commercial banks that have more recently started to establish ATMs in some remote locations do not, so their service is cheaper to the users. This can also undercut the TCU's business model, leading to loss of Aboriginal employment and training.

References

- Altman J & Kerins S (2012). *People on Country: vital landscapes, Indigenous futures*, Federation Press, Annandale.
- Bamblett L (2015). *Aboriginal advantage: an insider look at an Aboriginal community*, Parliamentary Library National Reconciliation Week lecture 2015, Canberra.
- Campbell D & Hunt J (2015). Making use of payments: a community development model. In: Brennan S, Davies M, Edgeworth B & Terrill L (eds), *Native title reform: from Mabo to Akiba – a vehicle for change and empowerment?*, Federation Press, Annandale.
- Finlayson J (2007a). *Success in Aboriginal communities: a pilot study*, Australian Collaboration & Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra.
- (2007b). *Maps to success: successful strategies in Indigenous organisations – a pilot study*, Australian Collaboration & Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra.
- (2007c). *Organising for success: policy report – successful strategies in Indigenous organisations*, Australian Collaboration & Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra.
- Hunt J (2013a). *Engagement with Indigenous communities in key sectors*, Resource Sheet 23, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Canberra, & Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne, www.aihw.gov.au/closingthegap/publications.
- (2013b). *Engaging with Indigenous Australia: exploring the conditions for effective relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities*, Issues Paper 5, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Canberra, & Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne, www.aihw.gov.au/closingthegap/publications.
- , Smith D, Garling S & Sanders W (2008). *Contested governance: culture, power and institutions in Indigenous Australia*, ANU EPress, Canberra.
- Reconciliation Australia (2005). *Celebrating Indigenous governance: success stories of the Indigenous Governance Awards*, Reconciliation Australia, Canberra.
- (2006). *Celebrating Indigenous governance: success stories of the Indigenous Governance Awards*, Reconciliation Australia, Canberra.
- (2008). *Celebrating Indigenous governance: success stories of the Indigenous Governance Awards*, Reconciliation Australia & BHP Billiton, Canberra.
- (2012). Indigenous Governance Awards, presentation event, 12 October 2012, Reconciliation Australia, Canberra.

CONTACT US

Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research
Research School of Social Sciences
ANU College of Arts & Social Sciences

Copland Building #24
The Australian National University
Canberra ACT 0200
Australia

T +61 2 6125 0587
W caepr.anu.edu.au

ANU CRICOS Provider Number: 00120C